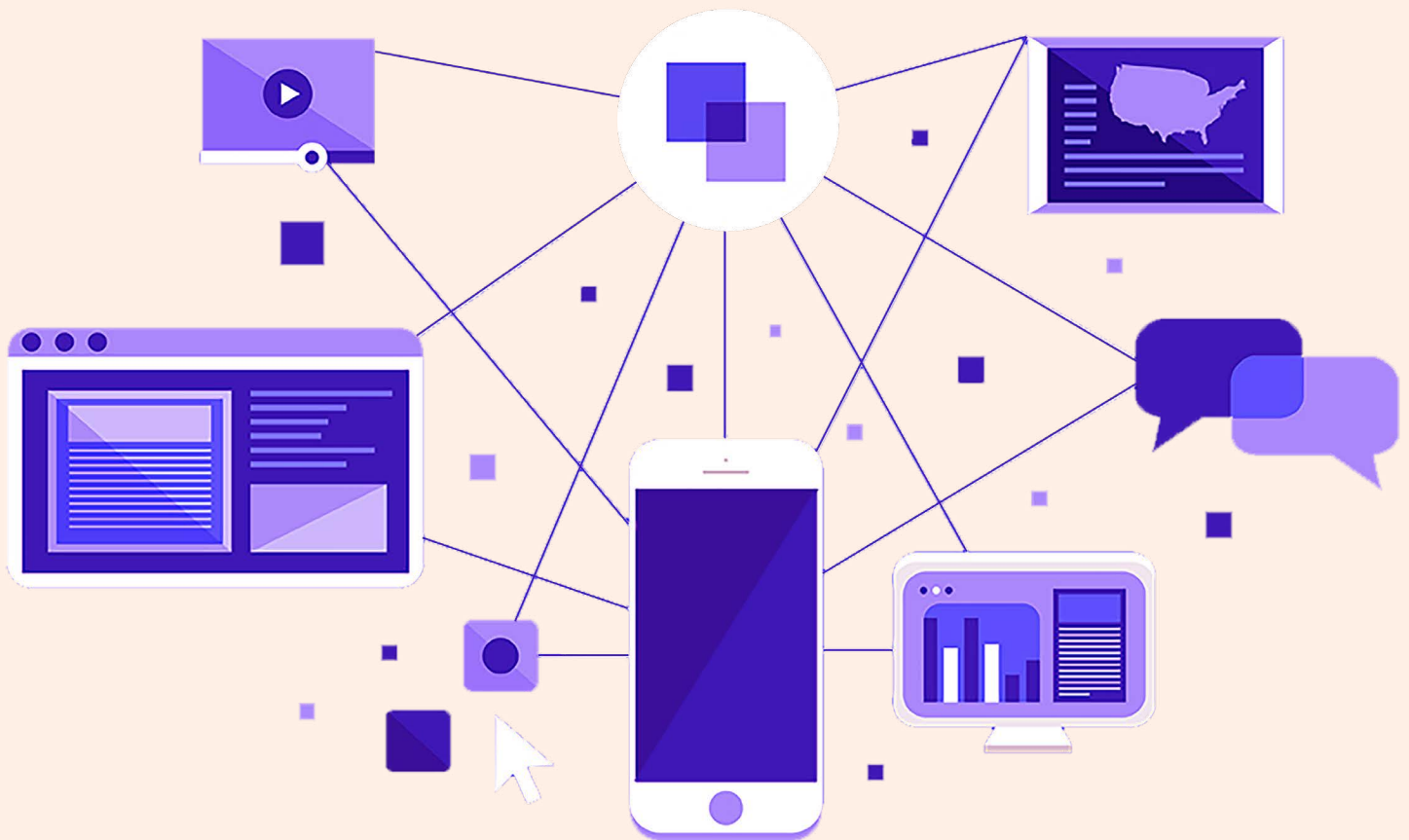# NewsLens 2020: How Americans Process the News

An experimental platform that measures attitudes toward different news sources

Executive Summary

A shift toward online news consumption, combined with greater political polarization, has altered the media landscape. As part of its Trust, Media and Democracy initiative, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation partnered with Gallup to create NewsLens — an experimental platform and news aggregator first developed in 2017 to facilitate novel research on how people interact with the news online in a manner that offers insights to academics, technology policymakers and journalists.

In this report, Gallup examines data gathered through NewsLens during the 2020 presidential campaign to assess:

- **how much partisanship influences the way people engage with news content**
- **whether common ground still exists over which stories are considered good journalism**

NewsLens presented users with a same set of randomly selected articles — around 100 daily — about politics, the economy and science from 11 news outlets across the political spectrum. Users were randomly assigned to either a natural condition (which displayed the news source of each item) or a blinded condition (the news source of each item was not shown). The platform then tracked which articles users chose to read, the amount of time they spent on the content, their ratings of the content and the number of times they shared those articles on Twitter or Facebook.

The unique features of NewsLens offer researchers experimental data to complement findings on these issues generated from survey data. Key findings from this study include:

1 **Readers opt for politically sympathetic news content over adversarial content, but not by wide margins.**

Even when shown a source cue, a partisan user who clicked on 100 articles would open, on average, 36 from politically sympathetic sources, 33 from neutral sources and 31 from adversarial sources. This largely balanced news diet runs contrary to concerns that greater polarization is leading people to insulate themselves in ideological information bubbles. The average partisan user did not actively seek out or exist in such comfortable spaces.

2 **Judgment of content is based on the messenger more than the message.**

On a five-star rating scale, partisan users gave an average of 1.37 more stars to politically sympathetic sources than adversarial ones in the natural condition and 0.51 more stars in the blinded condition. So, while users did not significantly alter their news consumption habits based on the messenger, such awareness

did significantly affect how they felt about the content they read — further supporting findings from previous survey experiments. Notably, Republicans distinguished less between content across the political spectrum than Democrats did in the blinded condition, suggesting Republicans may have relied more on the messenger to evaluate news content than Democrats.

3   The community offers a good sense of how others will rate content.

After data collection, a community score was constructed for each article based on other user ratings. This score was strongly correlated with how others rated the same content, even when the news source was known. This strong association indicates more common ground exists among news consumers than most tend to assume when it comes to assessing quality or trustworthiness at the article level. Such consensus also suggests a potential opportunity exists to incorporate these scores into social media and internet search ranking algorithms and internet searches to elevate the quality of news content online.

4   Perceived personal relevance boosts perceptions of overall journalistic quality.

Users tended to rate various quality components of articles — fairness, completeness, accuracy and personal relevance — similarly. However, when controlling for this tendency, the perceived relevance of an article (i.e., "covers the topic in a way that matters to me") predicts how users rate the article's overall quality, including those from adversarial news outlets. For newsrooms, this finding — which has been understudied in previous research — confirms that an effective path to forming a stronger connection with their audience is to make news coverage more personally relevant to that audience.

These findings build on existing academic research, adding to our knowledge of how readers engage with the news. By cultivating a deeper understanding of readers' behaviors and attitudes toward news content, NewsLens offers academics, technology policymakers and journalists actionable insights, such as ways to boost general exposure to quality content online and improve the perceived quality of specific journalistic content.

Introduction

Since 2017, Knight Foundation and Gallup have partnered to study Americans' attitudes toward — and interactions with — the news. Key aspects to this research agenda have been to understand the factors that shape news consumption and how people engage with the news; however, measuring engagement historically has posed a unique challenge for researchers.

While traditional surveys remain a valuable tool, self-reported data on news consumption behavior and general attitudes toward the news have limitations.[1] People often have difficulty accurately retracing their news "steps" due to the complexity of the digital news ecosystem. Respondents also may provide socially desirable answers or engage in partisan cheerleading, which does not accurately reflect their attitudes and behaviors. Survey experiments offer a way to address these concerns, but their highly controlled environments may limit their ability to replicate the normal digital news experience.

Social media platforms, search engines and digital news publishers capture user data that offer the possibility for direct observation of news habits and behaviors. However, using such data often introduces a different set of limitations:

1) Citing user privacy, these companies frequently limit data access to researchers.

2) The data are often observational, limiting researchers' ability to identify cause and effect.

3) While these companies conduct many experiments on their platforms, the results are mainly for internal research and development purposes. Even when experimental results are released publicly, the research focuses on a circumscribed set of questions and often lacks transparency and replicability.

The Gallup/Knight partnership developed NewsLens — an online experimental platform and news aggregator — to advance research on media and politics by harnessing the opportunities afforded by online news consumption. This platform allowed researchers to randomly assign users to different experimental groups and evaluate how such interventions affect user behaviors and attitudes toward news content. Data in this report primarily focus on the most recent NewsLens cycle, which ran from July 26 to Nov. 17, 2020, with some reference to the previous cycle in 2017. For more details about the design of the NewsLens platform, please see Appendix A.

1   Barthel, M., Mitchell, A., Asare-Marfo, D., Kennedy, C., & Worden, K. (2020, December). Measuring news consumption in a digital era. Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. https://www.journalism.org/2020/12/08/measuring-news-consumption-in-a-digital-era/

NEWSLENS: A QUICK OVERVIEW

What were some basic descriptive data about user engagement?

July 26-Nov. 17

NEWSLENS ACTIVITY

NEWS

1,550
USERS

44,377
ARTICLE CLICKS

27,623
ARTICLE RATINGS
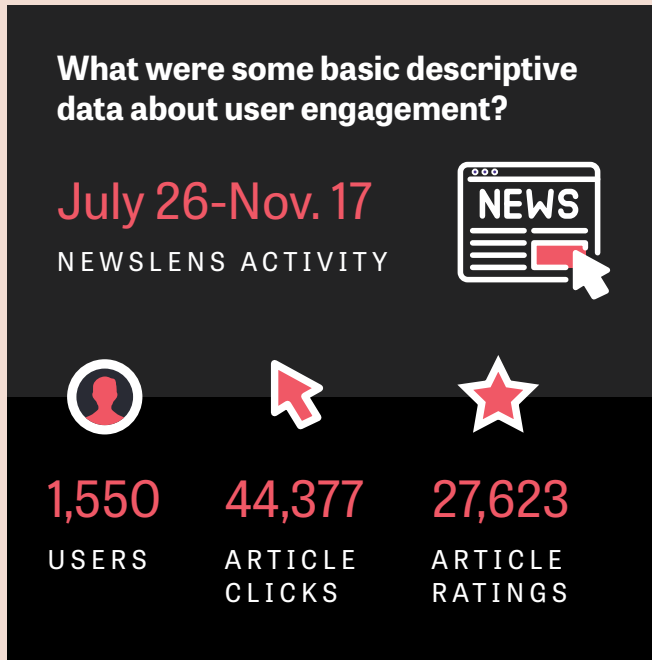
How did the news feed look different in the natural/blinded condition?

To examine how news consumption choices differ based on news outlet reputation, users were randomly assigned to either a natural condition showing the source cue or a blinded condition concealing the source cue. To ensure the news outlet source remained blinded, any mention of the news source in the body of the article was removed and replaced with [(PRESS)].

SOURCE CUE SHOWN EXPERIMENT CONDITION

BLINDED

NATURAL
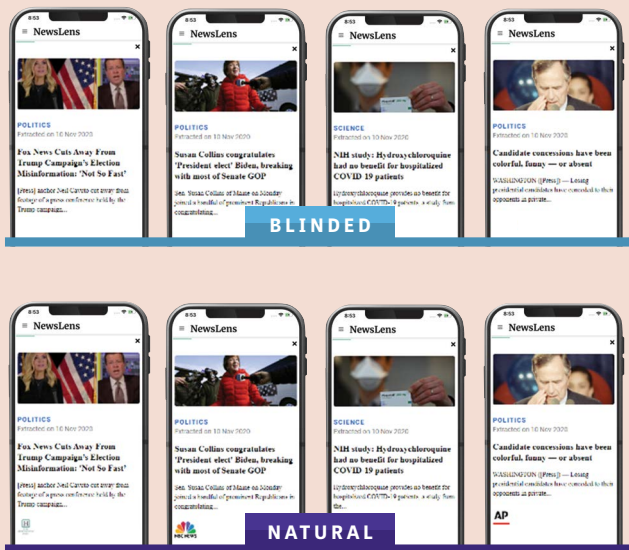
Which sources were displayed on NewsLens? How did we categorize them by political lean?

DEMOCRATIC-LEAN SOURCES

Vox   HUFFPOST   CNN

NO-LEAN SOURCES

POLITICO   n p r

NBC   THE HILL   AP

REPUBLICAN-LEAN SOURCES

FOX   BREITBART B   OAN One America News

What did the article view look like? What actions could people take and what did those look like?

NewsLens   Economy   Politics   Science   Log In | Sign

POLITICS
Extracted on 30 Jul 2020

AP

☆☆☆☆☆ Submit Your Trust Rating

NASA prepares for Mars 2020 mission launch

[Press] Newsroom UPDATED 2:30 PM PT — Wednesday
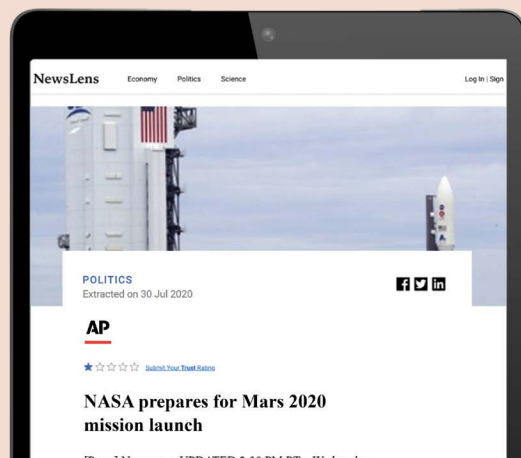
Over the years, scholars have examined the questions explored in this report and produced significant contributions to our understanding of media effects, news consumption habits and the underpinnings of high-quality journalism. This report builds on that foundation using a novel methodological tool to stimulate public conversation on these topics from another angle.

THE REPORT IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR SECTIONS:

1   **Part One examines partisan selective engagement, including the assumption that people seek out politically sympathetic content and avoid adversarial content.**

2   **Part Two explores how the messenger (i.e., source cue) shapes perceptions of content, especially among those who hold partisan commitments.**

3   **Part Three assesses whether crowdsourced ratings of a news article from the larger community are correlated with individual user ratings of the same content.**

4   **Part Four explores the relationship of news quality across four indicators to perceptions of an article's overall journalistic quality.**

Readers Opt for Politically Sympathetic Content Over Adversarial Content, but Not by Wide Margins

Do people engage differently with information that confirms or challenges their political views? To examine this question, NewsLens tracked the articles users read, the amount of time they spent on the content and whether they shared those articles on social media. The study revealed that when the source cue was hidden, users largely engaged with content from politically "friendly" and "hostile" news outlets similarly. When the source cue was shown, users chose to read politically friendly content slightly more often, spent a few extra seconds on it and were over twice as likely to share it. These findings run counter to the widespread assumption that many Republicans and Democrats actively seek out ideologically comfortable information bubbles.

The theory of cognitive dissonance posits that individuals tend to avoid information that conflicts with their commitments. In terms of news consumption, this theory suggests that people with partisan commitments actively seek out information from politically sympathetic news outlets and avoid information from politically adversarial ones in a process known as partisan selective engagement.

Prior research offers evidence of partisan selective engagement.[2] The Gallup/Knight Foundation Trust, Media and Democracy initiative found a majority of Democrats (61%) in 2018 and 2019 only named liberal-leaning news outlets among their top-three sources for news in open-ended responses, while a plurality of Republicans (45%) only named conservative-leaning outlets.[3] A 2004 study showed that Americans gravitated toward media that shared their political views but did not necessarily avoid news outlets that challenged them. In that study, 64% of conservative Republicans and 26% of liberal Democrats consistently relied on at least one conservative outlet, while 43% of conservative Republicans and 76% of liberal Democrats consistently relied on at least one liberal outlet.[4]

2   Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Kiley, J., & Matsa, K. E. (2014). Political polarization & media habits. Pew Research Center. https://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/?utm_source=link_newsv9&utm_campaign=item_309176&utm_medium=copy

3   Ritter, Z. (2020, April). Amid pandemic, news attention spikes; media favorability flat. Gallup.com. https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/307934/amid-pandemic-news-attention-spikes-media-favorability-flat.aspx

4   Stroud, N. J. (2008). Media use and political predispositions: Revisiting the concept of selective exposure. Political Behavior, 30(3), 341-366.

A controlled survey experiment also found substantial evidence of partisan selectivity for content at the article level.[5]

Yet, recent observational research using trace data (e.g., web browser tracking history or the type of Twitter accounts followed) shows isolated information bubbles are not as widespread or self-contained as generally assumed online.[6] This and other studies add to the growing consensus that internet users are exposed to a rather wide range of perspectives on social media and search engines. Additionally, the choices those users make about which content to consume outweigh the impact of algorithms on exposure to content.[7]

The NewsLens research offers a unique opportunity to examine the prevalence of partisan selective engagement in a realistic but controlled environment during a time when politics was centerstage — the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign.

The experiment results showed low overall "click" rates, with users reading fewer than one-in-twenty of the articles served. As expected, partisan readers clicked on more articles from sources mirroring their politics. This tendency persisted whether the source cue was shown or hidden but was more pronounced when readers could see which outlet produced the content, suggesting individuals' awareness of who publishes an article contributes to partisan selective exposure but does not fully account for it. Users also appeared to gravitate toward headlines and images that confirmed their views even when they did not see a source cue.

FIGURE 1

Click Behavior of Users With Partisan Commitments

% Of Articles Clicked
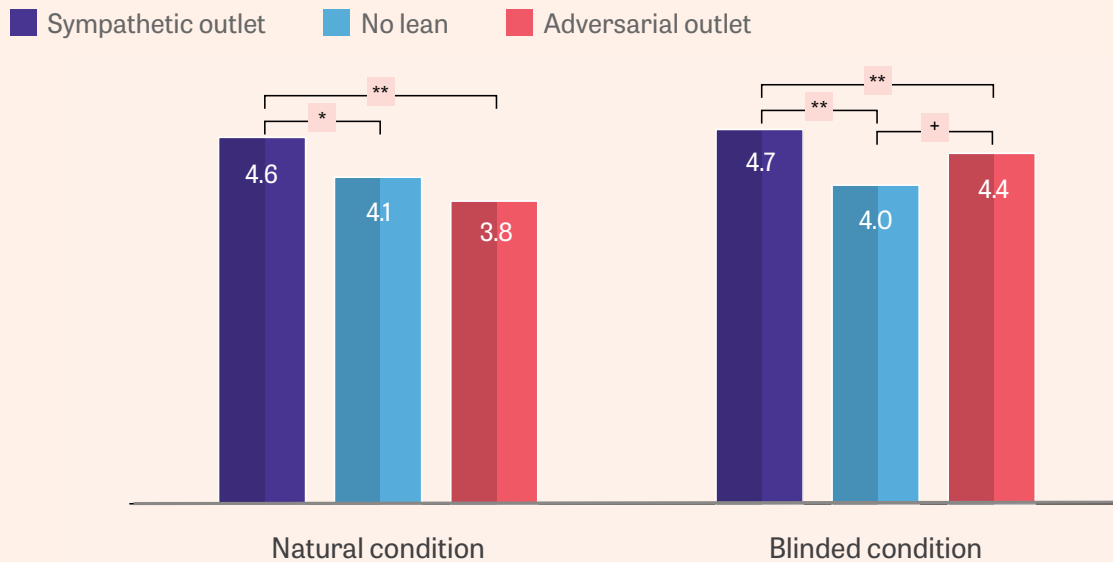
** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05; + at p<0.1   Note: Significance assessed with control for partisan affiliation and article presentation order

5   Iyengar, S., & Hahn, K. S. (2009). Red media, blue media: Evidence of ideological selectivity in media use. Journal of Communication, 59(1), 19-39. http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/red_media_blue_media-_evidence_of_ideological_selectivity_in_media_use.pdf

6   Eady, G., Nagler, J., Guess, A., Zilinsky, J., & Tucker, J. A. (2019). How many people live in political bubbles on social media? Evidence from linked survey and Twitter data. Sage Open, 9(1), 2158244019832705; Guess, A. M. (2020). (Almost) Everything in moderation: New evidence on Americans' online media diets. American Journal of Political Science. https://andyguess.com/publication/guess-2020-everything/
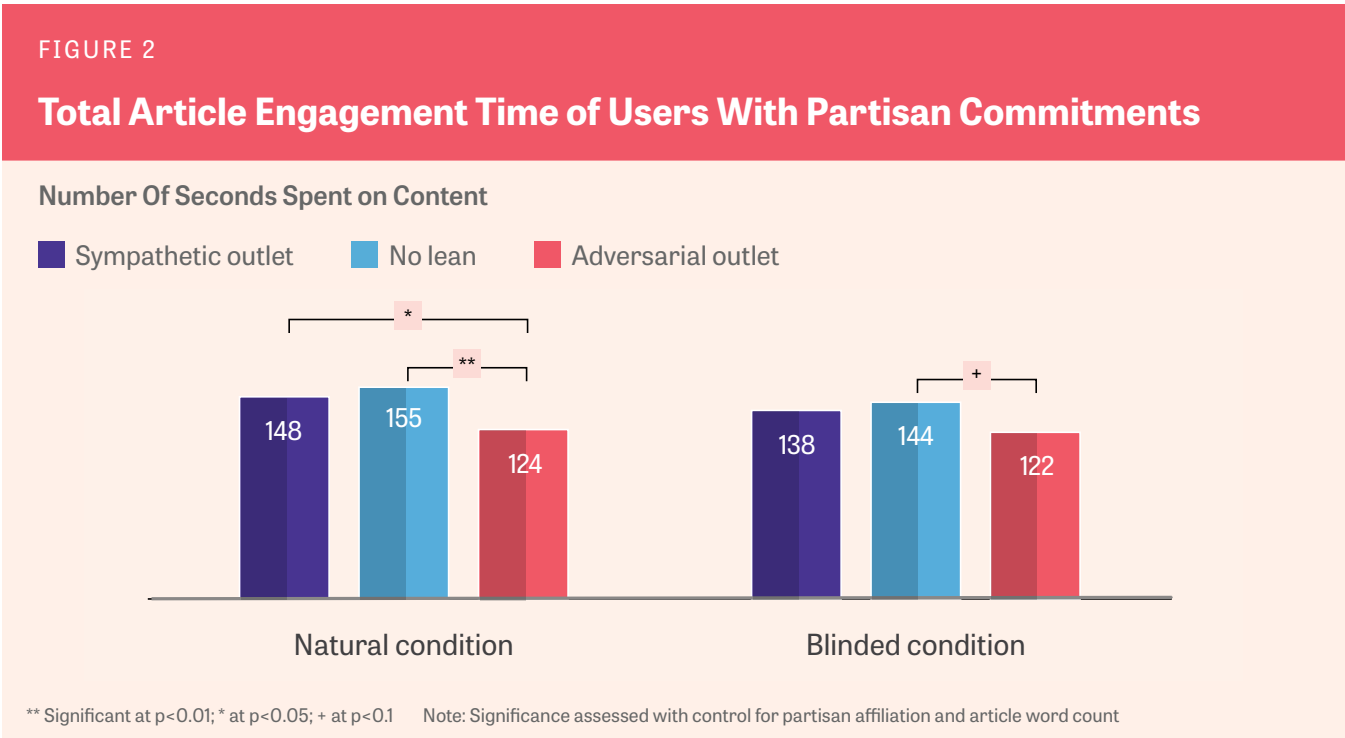
7   Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption. Public Opinion Quarterly, 80(S1), 298-320; Bakshy, E., Messing, S., & Adamic, L. A. (2015). Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook. Science, 348(6239), 1130-1132.

Despite these differences, the overall effect of partisan selective exposure on NewsLens was modest. When the source was known, a hypothetical user with partisan commitments who clicked on 100 articles would read, on average, 36 from politically sympathetic news outlets, 33 from no-lean outlets and 31 from politically adversarial outlets. This largely balanced news diet suggests the average user with partisan commitments was not strongly motivated by a desire to consume information from politically sympathetic news outlets.

> The average partisan was not strongly motivated to consume information from politically sympathetic news outlets.

This finding supports other recent research on the rareness of online echo chambers and runs counter to the widespread assumption that many Republicans and Democrats actively seek out and exist in ideologically comfortable information bubbles.[8] The partisan selective exposure that did exist in the NewsLens study appears consistent with research showing that people are more likely to seek out content that confirms their views rather than avoid content that challenges them.[9] Indeed, consuming news from across the political aisle may have certain benefits, like fulfilling a curiosity about what the other side is saying or feeling prepared to defend your positions.[10]

Another observable manifestation of partisan selective engagement in the NewsLens study was the average amount of time a user spent on a specific article, which may be considered a proxy for how users process information.[11] Compared with content from politically adversarial outlets, users engaged with content from sympathetic outlets 24 seconds longer in the natural condition and 16 seconds longer in the blinded condition.

FIGURE 2

Total Article Engagement Time of Users With Partisan Commitments

Number Of Seconds Spent on Content

■ Sympathetic outlet   ■ No lean   ■ Adversarial outlet

	Natural condition	Blinded condition
Sympathetic outlet	148	138
No lean	155	144
Adversarial outlet	124	122

** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05; + at p<0.1   Note: Significance assessed with control for partisan affiliation and article word count

8   Yang, T., Majo-Vázquez, S., Nielsen, R. K., & González-Bailón, S. (2020). Exposure to news grows less fragmented with an increase in mobile access. PNAS. https://www.pnas.org/content/117/46/28678; Guess, A. M. (2020). (Almost) Everything in moderation: New evidence on Americans' online media diets. American Journal of Political Science. https://andyguess.com/publication/guess-2020-everything/

9   Garrett, R. K. (2009). Politically motivated reinforcement seeking: Reframing the selective exposure debate. Journal of Communication, 59(4), 676-69.

10 Valentino, N. A., Banks, A. J., Hutchings, V. L., & Davis, A. K. (2009). Selective exposure in the internet age: The interaction between anxiety and information utility. Political Psychology, 30(4), 591-613; Westen, D., Blagov, P. S., Harenski, K., Kilts, C., & Hamann, S. (2006). Neural bases of motivated reasoning: An fMRI study of emotional constraints on partisan political judgment in the 2004 US presidential election. Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience, 18(11), 1947-1958.

11 To measure total engagement time, we used time stamps associated with URLs that start with the click that opens the articles and end with the click to exit the article.

While a difference appears to exist as expected, an important confounding variable is article length, as people are likely to spend more time on longer articles. After controlling for article word count, users spent around 10 more seconds on content from politically sympathetic and no-lean outlets than adversarial ones when the source was shown. In the blinded condition, there was no statistically significant difference after controlling for word count in the total time spent on content from the different types of news outlets. In other words, source cue appears to have had only a slight effect on how users processed content.

When source was shown, users spent 10 more seconds on content from politically sympathetic outlets compared with adversarial ones. When source was not shown, there was no difference.

A final form of partisan selective engagement captured on NewsLens was sharing behavior — a meaningful activity on the platform because shared articles appeared on the users' social media. Users were over twice as likely to share content they clicked from politically sympathetic outlets compared with content from adversarial ones when the source was shown. In contrast, no statistically significant difference in the likelihood to share content from sympathetic, no-lean and adversarial news outlets existed when the source was not shown.

FIGURE 3

Sharing Behavior of Users With Partisan Commitments

% Shared of Clicked

■ Sympathetic outlet   ■ No lean   ■ Adversarial outlet
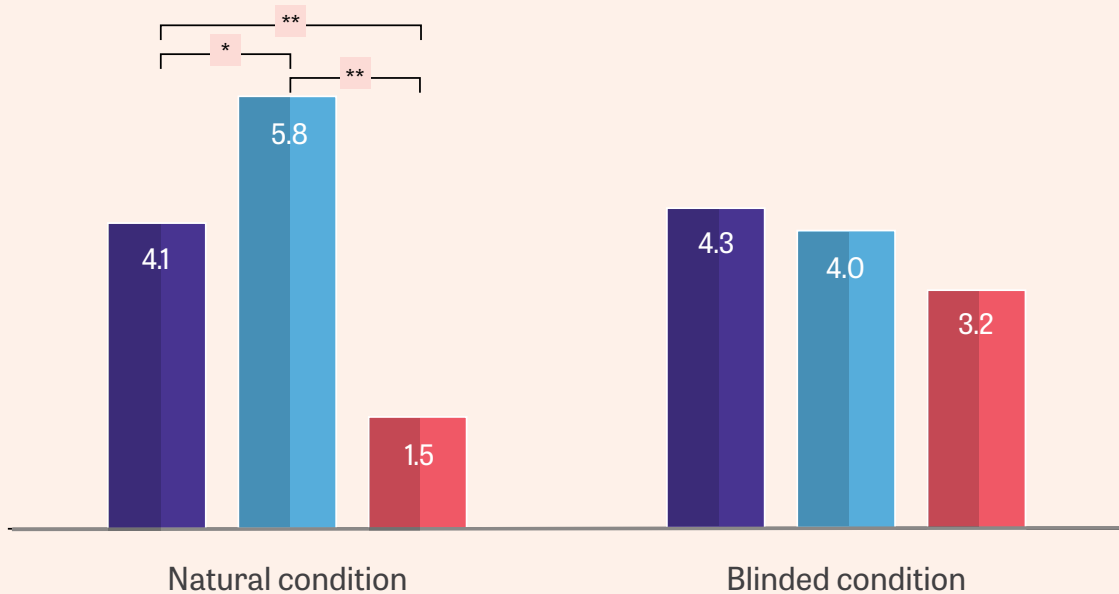
** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05   Note: Significance assessed with control for partisan affiliation and article word count

In summary, the various forms of partisan selective engagement captured on NewsLens show that users with partisan commitments interacted differently with content depending on whether the source of that content was shown or hidden from them. Yet, even in the natural condition, the effect size for partisan selective engagement was modest — at least for articles clicked and time spent on article content. On average, partisan users did not seek out an ideologically comfortable information bubble. However, it is possible some partisans may display different behavior patterns. While this pattern was not detected on NewsLens — possibly due to a low sample size of such users — other studies suggest a small group of partisans inhabits such spaces.[12]

This finding contributes to recent academic research questioning the common narrative that online echo chambers are widespread and deeply embedded.[13] While source cues had a minor effect on what content NewsLens users read and how long they engaged with it, the following section explores how much source cues shaped the way people received that content.

12   Guess, A. M. (2020). (Almost) Everything in moderation: New evidence on Americans' online media diets. American Journal of Political Science.

13   Yang, T., Majo-Vázquez, S., Nielsen, R. K., & González-Bailón, S. (2020). Exposure to news grows less fragmented with an increase in mobile access. PNAS. https://www.pnas.org/content/117/46/28678

Judgment of Content Is Based on the Messenger More Than the Message

How much do people judge news stories based on the content (message) rather than the source of the content (messenger)? NewsLens addressed this question by examining the ratings given to news stories and found that users gave content from politically sympathetic news outlets a higher rating than adversarial ones when source cues were hidden, and a much higher rating when source cues were shown. In fact, showing the source contributed to over half the difference in user ratings of content between "friendly" and "hostile" news outlets. For users with political commitments, the messenger shaped perceptions of content more than the message.

When it comes to media credibility, oftentimes, the source of the content matters more than the content itself, at least in the eyes of news audiences. This heuristic — or mental shortcut — can prove convenient for news consumers overwhelmed by the sheer volume of news available.

Previous survey experiments have demonstrated that people perceive the same content differently depending on whether the source cue randomly assigned to the content comes from a politically sympathetic or adversarial news outlet.[14] While such studies demonstrate the importance of source cues in the pre-judgment of content, they do not capture how people would feel about the actual content these news outlets produce without a source cue.

NewsLens readers were invited to evaluate content based on "trust" or "quality" using a five-star rating scale that appeared at the top and bottom of every article they opened (see Appendix A).[15] Comparisons of how readers rated articles from sympathetic and adversarial news outlets when the source cue was shown or hidden offer additional insight into how much the messenger and how much the message shape perceptions of the content.

Between July and November 2020, users rated content from politically sympathetic sources similarly regardless of whether the source cue was shown or hidden. In contrast, users rated content from adversarial news outlets 0.80 stars lower when the source cue was hidden. This asymmetric effect of source cue on the way users rated content suggests negative partisanship — i.e., the tendency to form opinions based on being against rather than for something — appears

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[14] Turner, J. (2007). The messenger overwhelming the message: Ideological cues and perceptions of bias in television news. Political Behavior, 29, 441-464; Baum, M. A., & Gussin, P. (2008). In the eye of the beholder: How information shortcuts shape individual perceptions of bias in the media. Quarterly Journal of Political Science, 3(1), 1-31.

[15] In addition to the natural and blinded conditions, NewsLens employed another experimental manipulation that randomly assigned users to a condition where the adjective next to the rating was either "trust" or "quality." The research aimed to examine whether users distinguished between these two multidimensional concepts. Partisan users rated articles similarly whether they evaluated the content based on trust or quality. In contrast, political independents appear to have distinguished between these concepts, giving articles in the trust condition lower ratings on average than those in the quality condition.
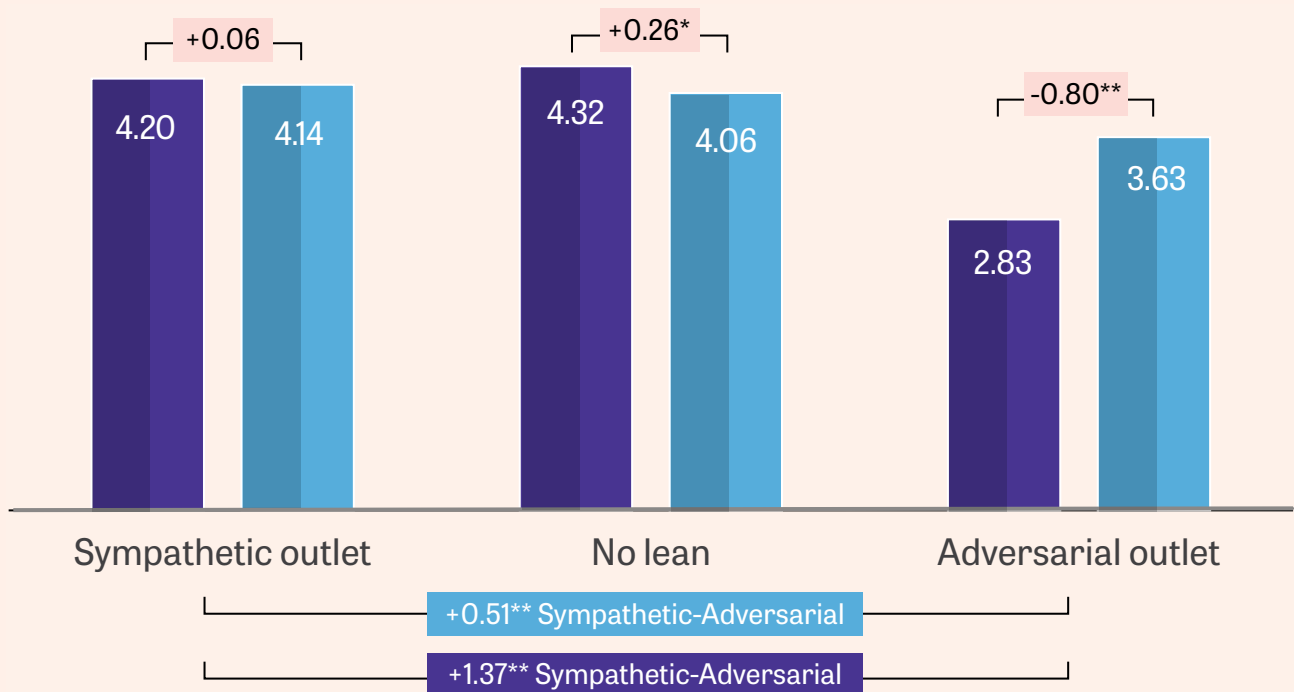
to drive perceptions of news content. The low ratings given to adversarial sources in the natural condition may only mean there was more room for that rating to increase in the blinded condition.

FIGURE 4

Average Partisan Evaluation of Content, by Outlet Congruence and Experimental Condition

Average Rating Out of a Possible 1-5 Stars

■ Natural condition   ■ Blinded condition


```
Sympathetic outlet          No lean          Adversarial outlet
  +0.06                     +0.26*                -0.80**
4.20    4.14              4.32    4.06                    3.63
                                             2.83
```

+0.51** Sympathetic-Adversarial
+1.37** Sympathetic-Adversarial

** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05; + at p<0.1

Without the assistance of the source cue, users rated articles from sympathetic sources 0.51 stars higher than those from adversarial ones. This difference offers evidence that the actual content typically produced by news outlets with a reputation of advancing partisan positions matters, but the size of the effect associated with the message (0.51 stars) was smaller than the one associated with the messenger (0.86 stars[16]). Overall, the messenger appears to have shaped how users with partisan commitments perceived content more than the message.

These general patterns conceal important differences among users with partisan commitments. For instance, Democrats rated articles from conservative outlets 0.67 stars lower than those from liberal outlets in the blinded condition. In contrast,

> The messenger shaped how users with partisan commitments perceived content more than the message.

16   The size effect associated with the messenger is calculated as the difference between sympathetic-adversarial in the natural condition (1.37) less the difference between sympathetic-adversarial in the blinded condition (0.51).

Republicans did not distinguish between content from liberal and conservative news outlets when the source cue was absent.

FIGURE 5

Average Evaluation of Content, by News Outlet Political Lean, Partisan Affiliation and Experimental Condition

Average Rating Out of a Possible 1-5 Stars

■ 1.00-1.99   ■ 2.00-2.99   ■ 3.00-3.99   ■ 4.00-5.00

News Outlet	Partisan Affiliation	Natural	Blinded	Difference (Natural-Blinded)
Liberal	Democrat	4.25	4.15	+ 0.10
No Lean	Democrat	4.42	4.07	+ 0.35*
Conservative	Democrat	2.67	3.48	- 0.81**
Liberal	Independent	3.55	3.43	+ 0.12
No Lean	Independent	3.77	3.77	0.00
Conservative	Independent	3.25	3.68	- 0.43
Liberal	Republican	3.55	4.05	- 0.50*
No Lean	Republican	4.03	4.13	- 0.10
Conservative	Republican	3.99	4.13	- 0.14
Difference (Sympathetic-Adversarial)	Democrat	+ 1.58**	+ 0.67**	
	Republican	+ 0.44*	+ 0.08	

** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05; + at p<0.1

Yet, partisan users on both sides of the aisle demonstrated negative partisanship. Compared with the blinded condition, Republicans and Democrats rated content from adversarial outlets lower in the natural condition — by 0.50 and 0.81 fewer stars, respectively. For sympathetic news outlets, Republicans and Democrats rated content similarly whether the source cue was shown or hidden.

Independents gave similar ratings to content from news outlets across the ideological spectrum but gave content from no-lean outlets a slightly higher average rating than content from outlets with a partisan lean.

While these results reveal some differences in how partisan readers responded to content from different news outlets, the findings rely on a specific user base obtained through an online open recruitment campaign (see Appendix A). Previous NewsLens research conducted in October and November 2017 [17] recruited participants

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17   An online experimental platform to assess trust in the media. (n.d.). Knight
     Foundation. https://knightfoundation.org/reports/an-online-experimental-platform-to-assess-trust-in-the-media/

through the Gallup Panel™, yielding a larger user base and offering an opportunity to re-examine that data with an eye for partisan asymmetries.[18]

These more recent findings largely replicate analysis of the 2017 data: Independents evaluated content from no-lean outlets more favorably than partisan outlets, especially in the natural condition. Republicans and Democrats rated content from adversarial outlets less favorably when the source was known. And Republicans distinguished less between content across the political spectrum when the source cue was absent than Democrats did. These findings suggest Republicans may rely more on the messenger to evaluate news content.

When the source was hidden, the difference in how users rated content from sympathetic and adversarial news outlets was larger among Democrats than Republicans.

FIGURE 6

Average Evaluation of Content (NewsLens 2017), by News Outlet Political Lean, Partisan Affiliation and Experimental Condition

Average Rating Out of a Possible 0.50-5 Stars

■ 0.50-0.99   ■ 1.00-1.99   ■ 2.00-2.99   ■ 3.00-3.99   ■ 4.00-5.00

News Outlet	Partisan Affiliation	Natural	Blinded	Difference (Natural-Blinded)
Liberal	Democrat	4.09	3.83	+ 0.26+
No Lean	Democrat	4.21	3.90	+ 0.31**
Conservative	Democrat	1.68	2.79	- 1.11**
Liberal	Independent	3.01	3.29	- 0.27
No Lean	Independent	3.42	3.42	0.00
Conservative	Independent	2.63	2.78	- 0.15
Liberal	Republican	2.22	2.74	- 0.52**
No Lean	Republican	2.72	2.97	- 0.25
Conservative	Republican	3.78	3.27	+ 0.51**
Difference (Sympathetic-Adversarial)	Democrat	+ 2.41**	+ 1.04**	
	Republican	+ 1.56**	+ 0.53**	

** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05; + at p<0.1

18   The 2017 version of NewsLens pulled content from different sources — liberal outlets (Media Matters, Vox, The New York Times), no-lean outlets (Associated Press), conservative outlets (Fox, Breitbart, 100% FedUp) — and the adjective next to the star rating was "trustworthy." Various changes also occurred to the platform, such as the ability to rate articles by half stars in 2017 to only full stars in 2020. Finally, the 2020 field period occurred during a heated presidential campaign.

However, there are two notable differences between the 2017 and 2020 results. First, evaluations of content were not solely driven by negative partisanship in 2017. Compared with the blinded condition, Democrats and Republicans rated content from sympathetic sources higher in the natural condition, giving 0.26 and 0.51 more stars, respectively. Users appeared more receptive to content when they knew it came from a sympathetic source. Second, Democrats appear to have seen content from no-lean outlets as more sympathetic when the source was known, and Republicans saw it more as adversarial in 2017.

For Democrats and Republicans, two news ecosystems seem to exist — one trustworthy, the other untrustworthy. This divide echoes findings from other survey research[19] regarding the extent Americans with partisan beliefs trust various news sources.

NewsLens data from 2017 revealed additional asymmetries in how certain Republicans and Democrats perceived content from different types of news outlets. For instance, education level informed the way users with partisan commitments responded to content from outlets across the ideological spectrum when the source cue was shown.

> For Democrats and Republicans, two news ecosystems seem to exist — one trustworthy, the other untrustworthy.

Democrats with a four-year college degree rated content from liberal and no-lean outlets higher (by 0.57 and 0.41 more stars, respectively) than Democrats with no college education. Meanwhile, Republicans with a college education rated content from no-lean outlets higher (by 0.55 stars) and content from conservative outlets lower (0.43 fewer starts) than Republicans with no college education. In other words, the difference in evaluation between content from sympathetic and adversarial outlets was larger for college-educated Democrats (2.75 stars) and smaller for college-educated Republicans (0.99 stars) compared with their non-college-educated counterparts (1.83 and 1.80, respectively).

19   Jurkowitz, M., Mitchell, A., Shearer, E., & Walker, M. (2020). U.S. media polarization and the 2020 election: A nation divided. Pew Research Center, 24; Benkler, Y., Faris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). Network propaganda: Manipulation, disinformation, and radicalization in American politics. Oxford University Press.

FIGURE 7

Average Evaluation of Content (NewsLens 2017) in the Natural Condition, by News Outlet Political Lean, Partisan Affiliation and Education Level

Average Rating Out of a Possible 0.50-5 Stars

■ 0.50-0.99   ■ 1.00-1.99   ■ 2.00-2.99   ■ 3.00-3.99   ■ 4.00-5.00

News Outlet	Partisan Affiliation	Less Than 4-Year College	4-Year College or Greater	Difference (College-No College)
Liberal	Democrat	3.73	4.30	+ 0.57**
No Lean	Democrat	3.96	4.37	+ 0.41*
Conservative	Democrat	1.90	1.55	- 0.35
Liberal	Independent	3.07	2.96	- 0.11
No Lean	Independent	3.38	3.46	+ 0.08
Conservative	Independent	2.79	2.50	- 0.29
Liberal	Republican	2.10	2.48	+ 0.38+
No Lean	Republican	2.55	3.10	+ 0.55**
Conservative	Republican	3.90	3.47	- 0.43*
Difference (Sympathetic-Adversarial)	Democrat	+ 1.83**	+ 2.75**	
	Republican	+ 1.80**	+ 0.99**	

** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05; + at p<0.1

Differences also exist based on the strength of political ideology. Strong conservatives rated content from ideologically sympathetic news outlets 0.78 stars higher, on average, than weak conservatives did. In contrast, weak and strong liberals rated content from sympathetic news outlets similarly. Weak conservatives appear to be an outlier compared with the other ideological categories in terms of how differently they rated content from sympathetic and adversarial news outlets.

FIGURE 8

Average Evaluation of Content (NewsLens 2017) in the Natural Condition, by News Outlet Political Lean, Ideological Affiliation and Strength of Ideological Affiliation

Average Rating Out of a Possible 0.50-5 Stars

■ 0.50-0.99 ■ 1.00-1.99 ■ 2.00-2.99 ■ 3.00-3.99 ■ 4.00-5.00

News Outlet	Ideological Affiliation	Ideological Strength		Difference (Weak-Strong)
		Weak	Strong	
Liberal	Liberal	4.20	4.06	- 0.14
No Lean	Liberal	4.26	4.14	- 0.12
Conservative	Liberal	1.60	1.36	- 0.24
Liberal	Conservative	2.26	1.75	- 0.51
No Lean	Conservative	2.70	2.32	- 0.38
Conservative	Conservative	3.57	4.35	+ 0.78**
Difference (Sympathetic-Adversarial)	Liberal	+ 2.60**	+ 2.70**	
	Conservative	+ 1.31**	+ 2.60**	

** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05; + at p<0.1

Overall, the NewsLens study suggests political identity affected the way users perceived news content. Democrats were largely receptive to content from liberal and no-lean outlets and largely rejected content from conservative outlets. The opposite was true of Republicans — at least for strong conservatives and those with no college degree. While the relevance of political identity in perceptions of news content is well-established, these findings related to partisan asymmetries offer nuance into research on hostility toward specific news content.[20]

When the source cue was hidden, partisan users still seemed to discern a political message that led them to rate content from sympathetic and adversarial outlets differently, but evaluation based on message alone was muted, especially among Republicans.

Yet, in line with previous research, awareness of the messenger mattered more.[21] Partisan users heavily relied on the source cue as a critical piece of information to guide their judgment of content. Therefore, while these users may not have sought out or avoided news stories based on source cues, their openness to the content was strongly influenced by knowing who produced it.

20   Vallone, R. P., Ross, L., & Lepper, M. R. (1985). The hostile media phenomenon: Biased perception and perceptions of media bias in coverage of the Beirut massacre. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49(3): 577-585.

21   Turner, J. (2007). The messenger overwhelming the message: Ideological cues and perceptions of bias in television news. Political Behavior, 29, 441-464; Baum, M. A., & Gussin, P. (2008). In the eye of the beholder: How information shortcuts shape individual perceptions of bias in the media. Quarterly Journal of Political Science, 3(1), 1-31.

The Community Offers a Good Sense of How Others Will Rate Content

Can a crowd produce a reliable evaluation for an article's journalistic quality or trustworthiness? Following NewsLens data collection, Gallup created community scores for each article based on user ratings (but never displayed these to readers). These scores were highly correlated with how other users rated content. This association holds even when the source cue was shown and after controlling for that reader's views about the news source responsible for the article. These findings suggest that the crowd can produce a signal — beyond source reputation — for what others will consider good journalism at the article level.

Several studies have demonstrated that a large crowd can collectively provide reliable estimates for products and services.[22] For instance, a recent study shows that, on average, laypeople are quite capable of distinguishing between reliable and unreliable news outlets.[23] Substantial agreement exists between layperson crowds and fact-checkers when assessing the trustworthiness of news outlets. Although Facebook's crowdsource approach to identify (un) trustworthy news outlets was widely met with skepticism when launched in 2018,[24] this finding suggests that community scores can produce potentially meaningful assessments of reliability when applied to the news media.

The user ratings collected on NewsLens afford the opportunity to explore the crowd's ability to identify a consensus signal when it comes to news. This analytical shift-down to the article level offers a novel assessment of whether the crowd can detect what content is high-quality or trustworthy — indicators that are used as a proxy for good journalism.[25]

Importantly, community scores never appeared on the NewsLens platform. No visual cue was provided on any article about how the community rated the content that could influence how the reader rated an article. Rather, reader's scores were compared to larger community scores to see whether the crowd assessment predicted how the reader rated the same content.

22 Kittur, A., Chi, E., Pendleton, B. A., Suh, B., & Mytkowicz, T. (2007). Power of the few vs. wisdom of the crowd: Wikipedia and the rise of the bourgeoisie. World Wide Web, 1(2), 19.

23 Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2019). Fighting misinformation on social media using crowdsourced judgments of news source quality. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 116(7), 2521-2526; Allen, J., Arechar, A. A., Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2020). Scaling up fact-checking using the wisdom of crowds. Preprint available at https://psyarxiv.com/9qdza

24 Funke, D., & Benkelman, S. (2019, February). Crowdsourcing trustworthy sources on Facebook isn't as far-fetched as you think. Poynter. https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2019/crowdsourcing-trustworthy-sources-on-facebook-isnt-as-far-fetched-as-you-think/

25 An article received a community score only if it received five or more ratings. In 2017, respondents rated content according to trustworthiness. In 2020, users rated content according to trust or quality depending on which experimental group they were assigned (see Appendix A).

Basic community score: The mean value of all ratings given to an article in the natural and blinded conditions that does not include the user rating.

Bias-adjusted community score: The mean value of all ratings, adjusting for observable biases like partisanship given to an article in the natural and blinded conditions, that does not include the user rating.[26]

Other party community score: The mean value of all ratings given to an article in the natural and blinded conditions by users who do not share the same partisan commitments as the user.

Natural bias-adjusted community score: The mean value of all ratings, adjusting for observable biases like partisanship given to an article in only the natural condition, that does not include the user rating.

The "basic" community score is a naïve measure because it takes all user ratings at face value. Since some factors — like partisanship — shaped the way users rated content, especially when the source was known, Gallup created a "bias-adjusted" community score. This adjustment smooths out the tendency for partisans to give higher ratings to content from politically sympathetic outlets and lower ratings to content from adversarial outlets. The "other party" community score is best explained through an example: If the user rating of interest came from a Democrat, then the community score for that article only included ratings from independents and Republicans.

The results derived from the 2017 and 2020 data demonstrate that basic and bias-adjusted community scores are highly predictive.[27] For instance, a one-point increase in the 2020 bias-adjusted community score for an article is associated with a 0.55-point increase in how a new user would rate that same content.

FIGURE 9

Correlation Coefficients of Community Scores on User Ratings

Type of Community Score	2017	2020
Basic	0.72**	0.54**
Bias-Adjusted	0.38**	0.55**
Other Party	-0.03	0.19**
Natural Bias-Adjusted	0.70**	0.47**

** Significant at p<0.01; * at p<0.05; + at p<0.1

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26 Bias adjustments are derived through a model that includes basic user demographic information (party affiliation, education, gender, age), basic article information (dummy for news organization), the natural-blinded source cue experimental condition, a vector of controls that interact Democrats and source cue, and a second vector of controls that interact Democrat, source cue and the natural-blinded source cue condition. The results predict a bias-reduced score for every user rating based on the observable attributes of the raters and articles rated.

27 An OLS model with clustered standard error around each respondent is used and includes controls for partisanship, political alignment between user and content, education, gender and age. The analysis used in this section employs a z-score standardization for all ratings.

The mixed results for the "other party" community score suggest no strong relationship between community scores and user ratings existed in either direction. While ratings from users with different political commitments do not offer a signal for content quality, it is notable that the signal does not run in the opposite direction. For instance, Republicans did not rate content lower when that content's community score from Democrats and independents was higher.

Most importantly, the bias-adjusted community score still predicted other users' evaluations of that article when applied only in the natural setting, where the news outlets that produce the content were identified. Moreover, this correlation remained robust even after controlling for the user's assessment of the news outlet's overall journalistic quality. In other words, the bias-adjusted community score appears to pick up a signal of journalistic quality or trustworthiness at the article level independent from source reputation.

> The bias-adjusted community score picks up a signal of an article's journalistic quality or trustworthiness distinct from perceptions of the source's overall journalistic quality.

The controlled environment on NewsLens eliminated the influence of social endorsements, social networks and recommender systems on news article evaluations. These factors affect what articles people see and how they evaluate those articles. Further research in a less-controlled environment is required to determine whether these results hold in the real world and to assess whether a high community score aligns with expert evaluations.

However, the community score does pick up a consensus signal on NewsLens that predicts how a new reader would judge that content. This finding dovetails with a recent study that shows the aggregate ratings from laypeople of individual headlines from a news outlet are strongly correlated with expert evaluations of news outlet quality.[28]

Notably, the application is scalable and could be incorporated into social media ranking algorithms to elevate the quality of content online. The key advantage to such an approach compared to source-level ratings like NewsGuard[29] is recognition that not all content from a news outlet is equally good or bad journalism. This approach could prove particularly useful in distinguishing between high-quality news and potentially lower-quality commentary featured in the same source.

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28 Dias, N., Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2020). Emphasizing publishers does not effectively reduce susceptibility to misinformation on social media. Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review, 1(1).

29 See https://www.newsguardtech.com/

Perceived Personal Relevance Boosts Perceptions of Overall Journalistic Quality

People judge news stories based on a range of criteria. How much do people distinguish between such criteria, and do any of the criteria independently drive perceptions of an article's overall quality? NewsLens users were asked to rate articles by overall quality as well as four dimensions of quality: perceived fairness, personal relevance, completeness and accuracy. Readers generally gave articles similar ratings across all four dimensions, suggesting an underlying impression guided the rating for each dimension rather than each being independent from the others in the reader's mind. After holding this impression constant, personal relevance was the most important dimension for driving overall perceptions of an article's journalistic quality.

Few studies have explored whether people distinguish between criteria when evaluating news content and whether any of these factors independently shape perceptions of overall journalistic quality at the article level. A better understanding of the drivers of perceived overall quality may help news producers prioritize certain aspects, especially if the goal is to break through to an audience that may not be readily receptive to the content produced by that outlet.

To examine whether respondents distinguished between components of quality, NewsLens invited users to rate articles on a five-star scale for each of the following criteria (see Appendix A, Figure 4).

NEWSLENS CRITERIA[30]

- **Overall quality:** overall journalistic quality of the article

- **Perceived fairness:** reports on topic fairly and without bias

- **Personal relevance:** covers the topic in a way that matters to me

- **Completeness:** gives all relevant facts and perspectives

- **Accuracy:** provides accurate information

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30 Dimensions were selected from a larger set of quality indicators identified by previous studies on the subject. See Urban, J., & Schweiger, W. (2014). News quality from the recipients' perspective: Investigating recipients' ability to judge the normative quality of news. Journalism Studies, 15(6), 821-840; Lacy, S., & Rosenstiel, T. (2015). Defining and measuring quality journalism. Rutgers School of Communication and Information.

Overall, users rated the content across each dimension similarly, with roughly half the articles receiving the same rating across all dimensions. While users were more likely to make at least some distinction across the criteria in the blinded experimental condition, an overall impression of the news story strongly conditioned how users rated every dimension of the content. Straight-lining — the tendency of survey respondents to give the same answer to a list of items that are cognitively demanding — also likely contributed to the similarity in ratings across the different dimensions.

FIGURE 10

Percentage of Articles Given the Same Rating Across All Criteria

	Natural Condition	Blinded Condition
Rating Differed Across Dimensions	42%	51%
All Criteria Given 1 Star	9%	5%
All Criteria Given 2 Stars	2%	1%
All Criteria Given 3 Stars	9%	5%
All Criteria Given 4 Stars	9%	10%
All Criteria Given 5 Stars	29%	27%

Given the general lack of variation in content ratings, a latent construct was created to capture a user's overall impression of the content based on the above components. This construct was then used as a control variable in a model of the relationship between overall journalistic quality and the residuals of each dimension. This approach enabled the evaluation of which dimensions were independent drivers for overall perceptions of journalistic quality after controlling for the common underlying factor shared across the dimensions.

A statistically significant, positive association existed between personal relevance ("covers the topic in a way that matters to me") and overall perceived quality of a news story once the common underlying factor was considered. This relationship persisted in the natural and blinded conditions as well as for content produced by politically sympathetic or adversarial news outlets. None of the other sub-dimensions exhibited such a robust correlation with overall journalistic quality after controlling for the common underlying factor. Importantly, personal relevance drove perceptions of overall quality even when the user saw the source cue (i.e., name of the news outlet) and was rating content from an adversarial news outlet. All else being equal, content users considered more personally relevant tended to receive a higher rating for overall journalistic quality.

Content users considered more personally relevant received a higher rating for overall journalistic quality.

While it is intuitive that personal relevance would play an important role in evaluating content quality, these findings differed from previous Gallup/Knight Foundation survey research on the key indicators of trust in news outlets.[31] In those studies, accuracy and fairness mattered most: 89% of Americans regarded commitment to accuracy — and 78% commitment to fairness — as "very important" factors for why they trust a news outlet. In contrast, 43% assigned the same degree of importance to "the types of issues a news outlet focuses its coverage on," and 32% to "whether reporters understand the challenges 'people like me' face."

The level of analysis may contribute to these different results. People may use basic journalistic standards like accuracy and fairness to evaluate news outlets and place more importance on personal relevance when rating actual news content. It is also possible that personal relevance matters more for perceived journalistic quality than trust. Still, the fact that personal relevance boosted perceived journalistic quality for content regardless of whether it came from sympathetic or adversarial news outlets underscores its importance for how people digest actual news content.

For journalists and editors, this finding reinforces the importance of producing stories that connect on a personal level with their audience. There are limitations, as personal relevance is not universal. Nonetheless, fostering a sense of personal relevance may engender a stronger connection between the news organization and its audience and may offer a pathway to engage those with a different ideological perspective more successfully. Future research should examine what topics people find personally relevant and how coverage of different topics is framed to be regarded as more personally relevant.

31   Knight Foundation & Gallup, Inc. (2018). Indicators of news media trust. https://knightfoundation.org/reports/indicators-of-news-media-trust/

Conclusion

Gallup and Knight Foundation created NewsLens to conduct experimental social science research in a more natural online setting. The platform offers a model for opening the black box erected by social media platforms that limits the availability of data needed to answer pressing questions on complex issues regarding technology, information and society.

This report focuses on how partisanship shapes the way people engage with the news and whether consensus of what constitutes good journalism still exists. Partisanship was found to matter in some ways more than others.

In terms of selective engagement, people with partisan commitments exhibited a slight affinity to news outlets that share their political predisposition by clicking on content from those outlets slightly more often and spending a few more seconds on the content. In a high-choice environment like an online news aggregator, people did not appear to seek out or avoid news content primarily based on which outlet produced it.

Yet, partisanship strongly shaped how receptive people were to the news stories they clicked to read. Users with partisan commitments rated content from politically adversarial news outlets much lower than sympathetic ones. Awareness of which news outlet produced the content especially primed users to discount the information. Overall, partisan users exhibited a relative openness to read content across the political spectrum but proved mentally closed to certain content based significantly on political identity symbols like source cues.

While partisanship significantly shaped the way people saw the news, some common ground appears to remain for what people consider good journalism. This study demonstrates that the average rating of an article from others — i.e., the community score — is a useful predictor for how individuals would rate the same content. This result suggests the universe of readers pick up a consensus signal around what constitutes quality or trustworthy journalism at the article level.

Finally, when examining the sub-components of news quality, this study affirms the importance of perceived personal relevance as a critical driver of people's perceptions that an article is high-quality journalism, regardless of what news outlet produced the content.

These findings offer insights for those seeking to understand how individuals engage with news, including academics, technology policymakers and journalists. For academics, the data builds on previous findings through a novel experimental methodology. Technology policymakers may consider ways to leverage community ratings into social media ranking algorithms to elevate the quality of content online. And, for journalists, the report findings demonstrate what factors independently shape views of quality journalism.

Details on NewsLens

The NewsLens scraper took a set of articles early every morning from URLs on each news outlet's website covering the topics of politics, economics and science.[32] Roughly 100 articles per day were randomly selected from the larger list of all scraped stories so all users could see the same set of news stories. When NewsLens launched on July 26, 2020, the sources included were Huffington Post, Vox, CNN, AP, Fox, Breitbart and One America News (OANN), with roughly twice as many stories presented from CNN, AP and Fox than the smaller outlets. On Sept. 10, Politico, NBC, NPR and The Hill were added to this list, with roughly twice as many stories presented from CNN and Fox than from the other outlets.

An initial user base was recruited using Gallup and Knight Foundation professional networks. Knowing this population was not representative of the wider public, an advertisement campaign on Facebook, Twitter and Google was used to recruit U.S. adults we suspected would be harder to reach, like Americans without a four-year education or political conservatives. Finally, the extant participant pool at Volunteer Science Project at Northeastern University received invitations to join NewsLens.

When NewsLens users came to the site, they received the welcome message shown below that reminded them what tasks to perform.[33]

FIGURE 1

Welcome Message

Welcome to NewsLens

Sign up for NewsLens and help Gallup learn more about how people decide what news is trustworthy. Discover more by following the steps below.

Step 1: Read Articles
Visit the NewsLens site daily and participate in reading articles as you would on your normal day-to-day. Visit 5 days in a row and receive 50 pts.

Step 2: Earn Points
Users earn points by reading, rating, and sharing articles and completing flash surveys. To be eligible for rewards, users must complete their profile and other required tasks.

Step 3: Get Rewarded
For every 50 pts that you earn, you will be entered into a drawing for a $100 Visa gift card.

NewsLens was an experimental platform because users were randomly assigned to a group specified by the research team and remained in that condition for the entire research

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32 The initial selection of sources arose from a combination of factors: 1) legacy news outlet from previous iteration of NewsLens; 2) ideological reputation of the news outlet; and 3) audience share.

33 To assist with user recruitment, engagement and retention, users earned points for taking actions on the site. Every four weeks these points were turned into lottery tickets where users were entered to win $100 Visa gift cards. NewsLens participants could also earn points through public opinion surveys available on the platform. The main purpose of these surveys was to build a richer user profile of covariates for analysis.

cycle.[34] In the first research cycle that ran from July 26 to Sept. 29, 2020, we employed the 2x2 research design shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1			
Experimental Research Design			
		Star Rating	
		Trust	Quality
News Outlet Cue	Source Shown	Group 1	Group 2
	Source Hidden	Group 3	Group 4

The first dimension involved showing or hiding the identity of the news organization responsible for the content. To ensure the news outlet source was concealed, any mention of the news source in the body of the article was removed and replaced with [(PRESS)]. This convention also occurred in the source shown condition, so users had the same kind of reading experience across all experimental groups.

FIGURE 2

Navigation View

_____
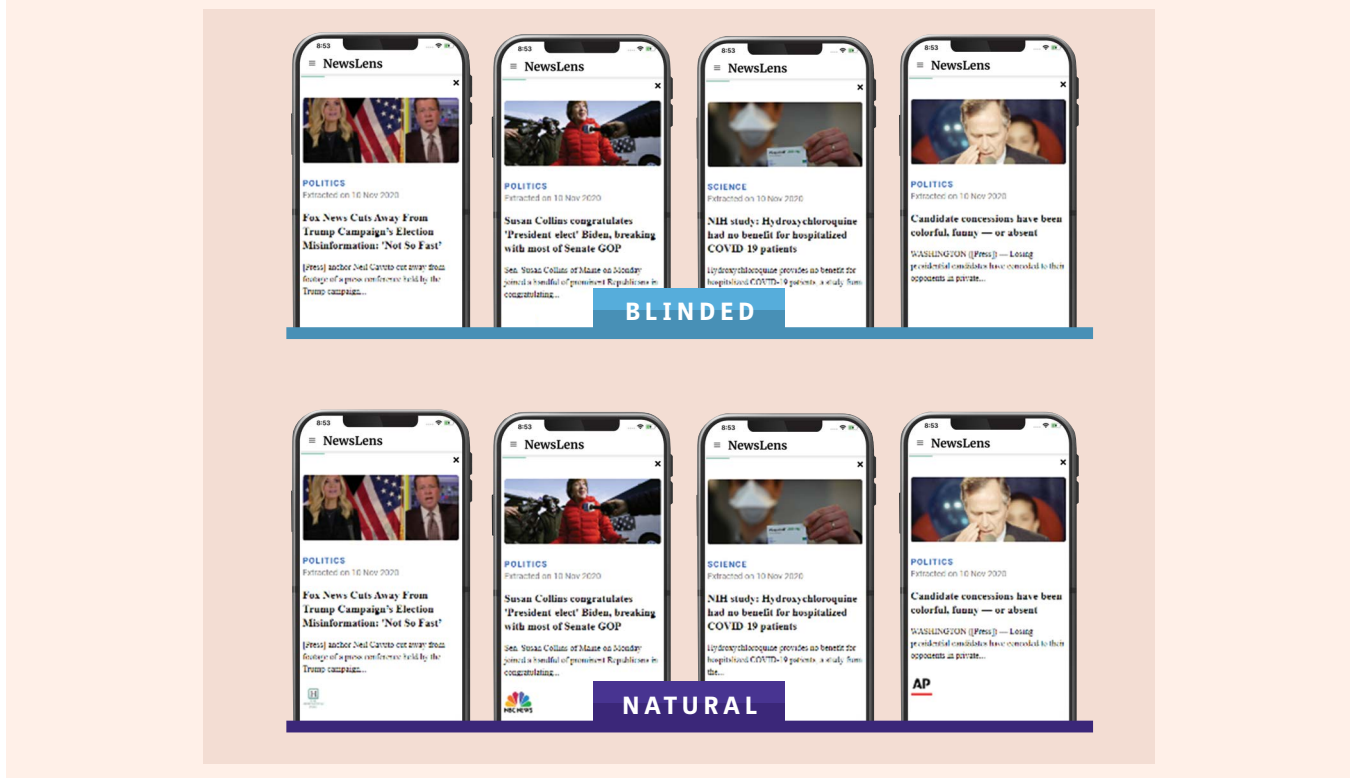
34   Researchers can currently manipulate the following functionalities on NewsLens: 1) which sources to use in the article draw; 2) what percentage of articles to include from each source; 3) which URLs to scrape for article selection; and 4) modification of the adjective associated with the star rating system.

The second dimension was the concept tied to the star-rating system. When users opened an article, they saw the full text and could rate the article between 1 and 5 stars. The text next to the stars read "Submit Your Trust Rating" or "Submit Your Quality Rating" depending on which group a user was assigned.

FIGURE 3

Article Open View
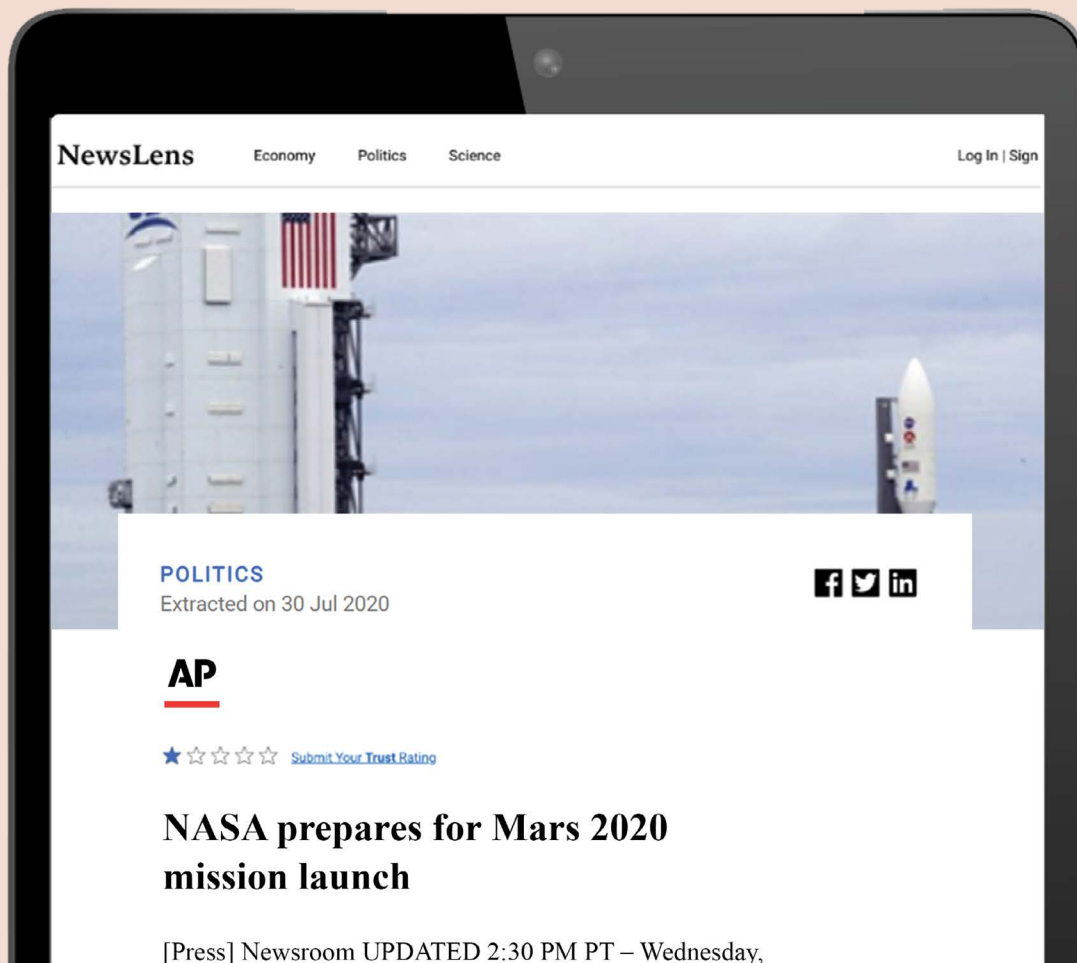
In the second research cycle that ran from Sept. 30 to Nov. 17, we retained the source shown and source hidden condition, but asked respondents to assess sub-dimensions of each article — fairness, relevance, completeness and accuracy — in addition to overall journalistic quality of the content. All users saw the same set of sub-dimensions, but to reduce the potential for ordering effects, we retained the 2x2 design. As shown in Figure 4, some users saw the sub-dimension ordered one way while other users saw them ordered another way.

FIGURE 4

Rating View in Research Cycle 2

Order 1: Group 1 & 3

Please rate the article based off of the following:

Overall journalistic quality of article	★★★☆☆
Reports on topic fairly and without bias	★★☆☆☆
Covers topic in way that matters to me	★★★★☆
Gives all relevant facts and perspectives	★★★☆☆
Provides accurate information	★★★★☆

Submit

Order 2: Group 2 & 4
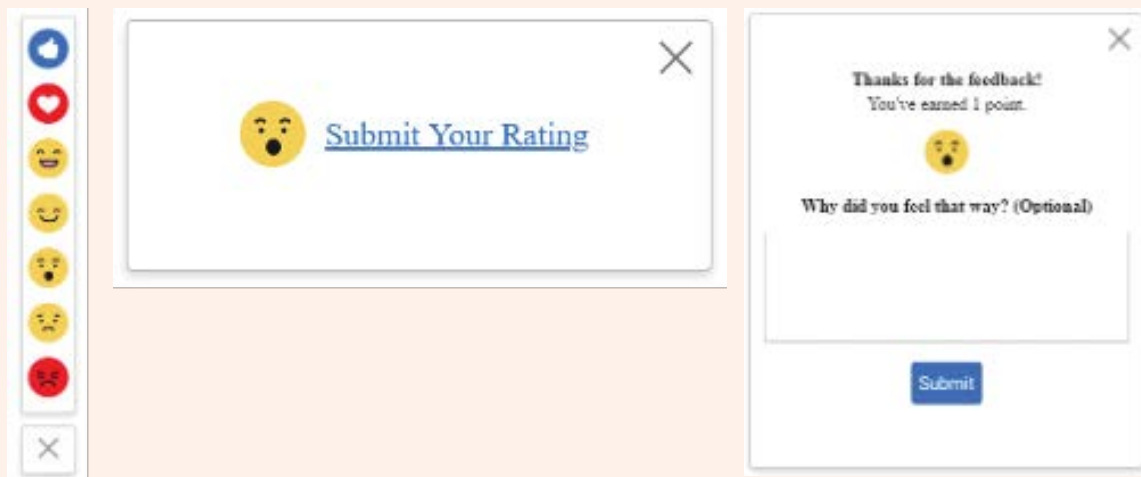
Please rate the article based off of the following:

Overall journalistic quality of article	★★★☆☆
Provides accurate information	★★☆☆☆
Gives all relevant facts and perspectives	★★★★☆
Covers topic in way that matters to me	★★★☆☆
Reports on topic fairly and without bias	★★★★☆

Submit

Additional features included the ability to share, comment and emoji. Sharing behavior on NewsLens was a real behavior. As shown on the top right corner of Figure 3, the user could share an article on Twitter and Facebook.[35] In the first research cycle, the user could also assign articles emojis and leave comments to explain the meaning of the emoji in relation to the article, as shown in Figure 5 below. In the second research cycle, emojis were removed, but the reader could still leave a comment on articles after submission of a rating.

FIGURE 5

Emoji Views

Submit Your Rating

Thanks for the feedback!
You've earned 1 point.

Why did you feel that way? (Optional)

Submit

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35   Due to an error in the data management system, only the first share in a day was recorded. Any additional shares from a user during that day were not captured. While unfortunate, there is no reason to suspect a person's first share in a day would differ from subsequent shares in any systematic way.

Finally, NewsLens incorporated four optional surveys on the site to gather additional information on users' attitudes and self-reported behaviors.

Here is an overview of activity that occurred during each research cycle.

RESEARCH CYCLE 1 (JULY 26-SEPT. 29):	
1,163 PEOPLE	clicked on article content; of those NewsLens users, **629** rated articles
25,340 ARTICLE CLICKS	with 4,797 articles receiving at least one click (out of **6,594**)
12,724 ARTICLE RATINGS	with **3,679** articles receiving at least one rating
2,150 ARTICLE COMMENTS	with **1,355** articles receiving at least one comment
598 ARTICLE SHARES	with **469** articles getting shared at least once
7,359 ARTICLE EMOJIS	with **2,750** articles receiving at least one emoji

RESEARCH CYCLE 2 (SEPT. 30-NOV. 17):	
580 PEOPLE	clicked on article content; of those NewsLens users, **497** rated articles
19,037 ARTICLE CLICKS	with **3,793** articles receiving at least one click (out of **5,940**)
14,899 ARTICLE RATINGS	with **3,515** articles receiving at least one rating
1,860 ARTICLE COMMENTS	with **1,232** articles receiving at least one comment
689 ARTICLE SHARES	with **606** articles getting shared at least once

The demographic composition of the user base who viewed at least one article was 49% male, 42% over 55 years old, 84% with a four-year college education or more, and 49% who affiliated as Democrats. Because this sample is not representative of the U.S. adult population, the analysis in the report focuses on effect sizes (the differences between experimental conditions) rather than point estimates (the mean of one of these conditions in isolation).

Gallup and Knight Foundation first employed NewsLens in 2017. For comparative reasons, some results in this report re-analyze these data. For more details about the 2017 version of NewsLens, please see the report here.

About This Study

KNIGHT FOUNDATION

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The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy.

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